

## JUI to review ties with Pakistan's ruling coalition

Apparently upset over military action against militants in the country's restive northwest and the denial of a key cabinet slot, the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI), a junior partner in Pakistan's ruling coalition, has called a meeting to review its ties with the grouping.

'Our highest decision-making body will meet some time (this) month to deliberate upon its relationship with the government and more importantly what options are available if the status quo persists,' The News Tuesday quoted sources in the JUI as saying.

The sources said the party was ignored in the government's 'surprise decision' to deploy the military against militants in the Khyber agency of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and was upset over the fact that National Assembly member Atta-ur-Rehman, the younger brother of JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, had been denied a cabinet slot.

According to an understanding between the JUI and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) that heads the ruling coalition, Atta-ur-Rehman was to be named adviser to the prime minister on religious affairs, while the party was to get representation in the Council of Islamic Ideology.

However, to the elder Rehman's 'shock and disbelief', the PPP's National Assembly member Maulana Hamid Saeed Kazmi was recently named adviser on religious affairs, The News noted.

The JUI has just six members in the National Assembly and its withdrawal would not impact on the ruling coalition, whose two principal parties command 212 seats in the 342-member house. Of these, the PPP has 121 seats and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has 91. In addition, the Awami National Party has 13 seats.

The JUI has always been regarded as the spoiler in Pakistan's muddy political scene.

It was part of the six-party Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) religious alliance that, in spite of being in the opposition, provided tacit support to the previous dispensation led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) and which was voted out in the February general elections.

While the PML-Q was derisively referred to as the 'King's Party' since it had the full backing of President Pervez Musharraf, the MMA was often referred to as the 'Mullah Military Alliance' due to its unwritten understanding with the president.

These machinations continue, if one were to read between the lines of what a PPP leader had to say about the JUI threat to walk out of the coalition.

'PPP and JUI have been good partners in the past as well. Therefore, there is nothing to worry about. The Maulana is our man and will remain so,' the PPP leader maintained.

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